

"The Human Happiness Campaign"

Experimental Fiction

Written by

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The Human Happiness Campaign

ARE YOU HAPPY?

There is something out there fighting for your happiness and its main goal is to “Legalize Happiness.”

By Meg Kroll

In today’s world there are a lot of causes that are being fought for. The war in Iraq, poverty, immigration, women’s rights - and happiness? One woman thought that happiness may need some help and founded The Human Happiness Campaign, an organization with one mission: to fight for happiness. Happiness is something we as humans fight for every day. It is our number one pursuit – no argument there, just ask any self-help teacher or psychologist.

“That’s all true,” says Maia Akiva, the founder of The HHC. “But what we are not aware of is that we ourselves create the rules and laws that make our happiness, so what The HHC is doing is fighting to make sure those rules and laws are right for everyone. Unfortunately happiness is a cause that needs fighting for just like any other because happiness is not out there for everyone.”

Does happiness really need someone fighting for it? Don’t we all have the ability to be happy? These folks think so, and the numbers who agree are growing. What started in a small studio apartment in Echo Park, Los Angeles, has become a worldwide movement, affecting thousands of people.

When I talked to people who are part of The HHC they explain to me that being involved in this organization is not about becoming happy but about changing the world perception

of happiness so that everyone can be happy. They liken it to a person joining an AIDS organization – obviously not to prevent themselves from getting ill, but to bring about awareness so no one will.

The HHC is a nonprofit organization and participation is free to members. Members meet regularly to discuss those ideas and then together find ways of how to help others, how to help themselves, and how to help their community. The HHC has no paid staff and operates on the humble profits made from the sales of the book that started it all, “The Human Happiness Campaign.” The book outlines the ideas on which the organization is based. It tells a fictional story of how The Human Happiness Campaign started, and what followed was as close to the fictional story as can be as the organization’s evolution actually mirrored the book.

I sat down with Maia to understand more about this growing cause.

K: Are you happy?

M: [Laughing] I work hard every day at being happy.

K: What do you mean work hard? How?

M: I exercise my mind. I want to keep my body and my health in good shape, so I run and walk and lift weights almost every day. To keep happy I exercise my mind almost every day. I think and I focus. I make time in the day to work on my thinking. It is as important to me as eating healthy and taking care of my body.

K: Is that what The HHC is about?

M: In part. This is only one of the ideas The HHC believes in. I believe everyone should practice this all the time, but it's up to everyone to decide how much work they want to do – just like with losing weight.

K: So what is The HHC?

M: It's an organization that fights for happiness and educates people about their and others' happiness. Our goal is to achieve "happiness equality" for all people. We all have the right to be happy, but it is not the reality of the world we live in right now.

K: What do you mean by that? Can anyone just "be happy"?

M: We live in a world that teaches us if you have that "list" of things you are happy, and if you don't have this list of things you are not. So, no, you can't just be happy. I am not the first person to talk about these lists, or the fact that money can't buy happiness, or the need to love yourself, etc. But what I'm talking about is something much deeper: It's about the rules we create in our mind of happiness and unhappiness. I will give you an example, one of many. Let's take our belief in self-love and its importance to our happiness. It's a great one and everyone in the world agrees on it, but even though we all agree on it, we act completely opposite of it. We tell people who are single that we're sorry they haven't found anyone yet. Like condolences. We teach self-love but then feel sorry for you when you need to practice it the most. If you are not in a relationship, and should be okay because you love yourself, we're sorry for you and we will be happy for you again only when you will find someone to love. If you stop and think about it, what we are saying is self-love is great as long as you practice it while you are in a relationship with another person. That's the message. Or consider the word "loneliness." It has such a negative connotation in today's society. I see it as a great thing, being alone and feeling loneliness. Let's change that to a positive. It's the time you get to spend with yourself. It's an amazing thing we have, our self. It should be the best quality time you have. It is a time when you can do whatever you want. A time when you only have to please yourself.

A time to get to know yourself. Isn't that great? But again, the problem is that we have been taught that loneliness is a bad thing. That's the message, the rule we created. You shouldn't be lonely. We spend all our life doing whatever we can to not be lonely. Yet, ultimately, alone is the one thing we always are. Isn't that absurd? So many people, when lonely or alone, are not happy. Why not be happy? Because someone told you shouldn't be? Because it's on some list?

K: You think that when you're in love and when you are in a relationship you aren't really happy?

M: No, no. Not at all. Being in love, being in a relationship is great. We are social creatures. We want friends. It's natural to want to have an intimate relationship with another person. But being happy should not be contingent on those things. What if we really could be happy, in love or not? The act of love, then, is not the thing that makes us happy, but something to add to our happiness, like a job we love or a new hobby.

K: That all sounds really great, but I must say that I have read all of that before in a lot of self-help books.

M: Of course. Like I said before I'm not talking about anything that hasn't been said before, but we still aren't living it. To me it's like the idea of poverty. Almost everyone would agree that no one should be poor, yet many will do whatever they can to get more money for themselves, even if it means taking it from someone else. It's one thing to agree on a concept and an entirely other thing to live by it. Same thing with happiness. I don't think we are intentionally mean to each other. We do it because it's what we are taught to do, even though no one is teaching us to do it. It's not a conscious teaching of course, but certainly an unconscious one. Think of it like this: Take spoken language. You didn't have to take special classes for basic speaking. It's something that we as human beings just learn. We take it for granted. If you have a baby you know that at a certain age he or she will start speaking whatever language you are speaking to them. It's

Human Development 101. So is happiness. It's sort of a language we pick up on from the time we are born. So we learn what makes us happy and what makes us unhappy just like a language. When you are 30 you know how to speak English without ever noticing that you have learned it. You also know what makes you happy without ever noticing that you have learned it. Why not teach ourselves another language of happiness? A better one.

K: And is that what The HHC does?

M: Yes – that and more. Of course what we are trying to do is to present this idea to as many people as possible and, as a result, create some real change. We are not working with kids. We are not trying to compete with parents. We are working with adults who have already learned the language of happiness that was taught to them. The change begins inside themselves and they become aware that they have learned something that is not right. Then comes the work of relearning it again differently, by changing themselves, and then, hopefully, by changing the people around them, spreading the idea to other people who are not happy. And then we hope that, as many of these adults become parents and are aware of this idea, that they teach a new language of happiness to their kids. It's similar to the chain letter idea.

The other part is about taking actions out of the ideas of The HHC into the world we live in. We are trying to change people and, in so doing, change the world.

K: That's a very big quest.

M: Yes, it is. It's a lifelong quest and it's not easy.

K: So, how do you do that? How does the organization work?

M: Well, the organization started with the book "The Human Happiness Campaign." It's a self-help fiction book that tells the story of how the HHC started. It's a fictional book,

so it is and it's not what really happened regarding the actual creation of The HHC. The book presents all the ideas and concepts The HHC is built upon. Some of the ideas I just told you about and there are a lot more. When you buy the book, which is sold at no profit to us, you become a member of The HHC. Then, if you want to get more involved, we have meetings that members organize in their respective communities. The meetings are free and anyone can attend as often as they like. In the meetings we talk about our personal experiences trying to learn The HHC ideas. We discuss our struggles and our successes and how we live these ideas in our everyday lives. In the second part of the meeting we plan actions to take in our cities and states.

K: What do you mean by actions? Like what?

M: Members go to events in their city, like festivals and fairs, and talk to people. Some groups organize demonstrations and petitions to bring more awareness to the ideas. For example, one member created a petition to "legalize happiness." Another organized a demonstration supporting loneliness. Some throw parties. I know of meetings where members have volunteered to help other organizations. Sometimes the meeting will bring in an expert for a lecture. Or they will sponsor an event for another organization. Some use the internet to communicate. It's really open and up to each individual and each group and their specific passions. There are no boundaries.

K: I have to tell you that it sounds a little bit like a cult. It seems like this is how we've heard cults have started in the past, with a book and then meetings. It is very hard to understand what exactly you are doing there.

M: Well, I can assure you that The HHC is not a cult, which of course, is exactly what I would say if it was. [Laughing] The HHC is open to anyone. Anyone can come and go as they please. We don't ask for money, nor do we require anyone to change their way of living. I know it's hard to understand because most of the change we are trying to achieve is internal, in people's thoughts and consciousness, and it's hard to measure that. We're

trying to change people's perception, and there is no way to find out if they did or not besides asking them or watching them for years. I think another part of the difficulty in understanding The HHC has to do with the fact that there is very little to compare us to. It is not an organization that can be defined by what we already know. It's not a religious organization. It's not political. It's not spiritual. I guess I would say it is a psychological organization. Our meetings are a little like group therapy. And I think that that's a very hard thing to understand. In today's society no one is telling you that maybe what you are thinking is not right. I think that most people aren't even aware that they are thinking so they are not going to be aware of what they are thinking about.

K: But everyone knows they think.

M: Of course. And everyone *knows* they breathe. However, we're not *aware* that we are breathing. We just do it. Same as thinking. We're not aware that we are thinking, but we just do it. And that is exactly what The Human Happiness Campaign idea is about. It's the idea that we walk around every day with a mind inside our head. This mind is the most powerful thing we have. And we take it for granted. We don't realize that we have this powerful tool, and so often we let our mind lead us, rather than working together with our minds. Most people don't realize that whatever they have been told that's what they are. Some people do know this but don't consider the possibility that they might be able to change or question it. If you stop and think about it, it's a very powerful thing. Very powerful. The HHC works to first get you to realize and accept what you have been taught to be, then helps you fight for what you should have been told. The fight is first and foremost with ourselves. I know it's a very extreme concept, maybe even a little radical, but that's what it's all about.

K: Were you amazed at the success of The HHC?

M: Of course. On a personal level I was always told that anything I did was not good, so I believed that anything I did would not be good, so yes, I was very surprised. But beyond

that, I wasn't surprised as much as I was happy and relieved to find out that I wasn't the only person in the world who thought this because there were many times I felt I was alone. I was very happy to share this with other people, and I truly believe that people who are part of this movement will have better lives and a better relationship with themselves. Not always easier, but definitely better. And I wouldn't use the word success anyway because if no one would ever listen to me I don't see it as failing. And what is success? If only 10 people would listen to me instead of thousands, is that a success or a failure? And who the hell gets to decide what is a success or failure anyway? [Pause] I do think that a lot of people found it right for them because so many people were told wrong things and life wasn't working for them like that. Many may have been functioning human beings, but they weren't happy. They had days and moments when they felt happiness because at that moment they did fit in, but at their core was a discrepancy – what they were told to be and what they were really are two different things. That discrepancy is painful. It hurts. Just like it hurt me. What has also been rewarding is to see that these issues affect people from every walk of life, which makes total sense to me because, as I said before, we all have a mind no matter who we are or where we are from. Every human being on this planet has a mind that works more or less the same. So we all, no matter who we are, have this problem of someone else telling us something that is wrong. How can we not see how amazing, dangerous, and important this is? No matter which part of the world you live in. We think it only happens in cults. But it's also happening to us on different level everyday.

K: What do you mean by "Just like it hurt me"?

M: [Smiling] I, for many years, like a lot of people, didn't feel that I could be myself, whatever that was. I felt that I was required to be something else in order to be happy. Something different than what I was. More successful, to make this amount of money, wear this and not that, have more friends, have this friend, not that friend, not be lonely, be less single, have a bigger apartment, buy certain things, have this job, live there, have a family, have a life. You have to have a life. Now don't get me wrong – there is nothing

wrong with wanting things, but it is your right to choose what to want. And sadly we don't allow people to choose what to want. We teach them what to want. And to me that was not a fun feeling to live with.

K: The opening line in the book "The Human Happiness Campaign" is, "The moment I wanted to kill myself was the moment I knew there was something wrong with the world.. Did you really try to kill yourself?"

M: I really wanted to kill myself, but thankfully I never got to the trying part. But sadly some people do.

K: What does this line mean? And what is its connection to The HHC?

M: To me that line explains the mind connection between us and the world. We are all connected, and if you think you have a mind of your own, you are wrong. There is a connection that, once you become aware of it, is the first step in becoming happy. It describes the understanding of our self and the understanding of the world that made us our self. Basically, the more you understand and are aware of yourself and the more you understand and are aware of the world that made you yourself, the more you will be happy. It's not an easy happiness, but it's a real one. That's what The HHC is all about. We bring people's awareness to that mind connection and help them find that connection, in whatever way is right for them. We fight to make sure that everyone has a fair share in happiness, no matter what was told to them. It's The HHC ideology in one sentence that I believe is really only understood when one begins to do the work and starts getting to know one's self.

K: What would you like The Human Happiness Campaign's future to be?

M: I hope that it can reach more and more people so they will be a part of this and make the world a happier place. There is no way to measure the impact of this organization by

today's standards of money, power, and fame. My hope is that by changing individuals hopefully some day there will be a bigger shift in the world at large. I do have a goal to one day have a huge meeting of the organization and all its members. I think that will have a different impact on the organization and the power it holds in the world. You know the saying "Give a man a fish, and you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish, and you have fed him for a lifetime." My take on it is, "Give a man a happy thought and you have made him happy for today. Teach a man he can choose his thoughts and you have made him happy for a lifetime."

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